

**MENDELSSOHN**  
**SYMPHONY NO.4 IN A MAJOR (ITALIAN)**  
**ERNEST ANSERMET**  
**L'ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE**



**HEBRIDES OVERTURE · RUY BLAS OVERTURE · THE FAIR MELUSINE OVERTURE**

# MENDELSSOHN

ERNEST ANSERMET conducting L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

## SIDE ONE

MENDELSSOHN: Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90 "Italian"

1. Allegro vivace
2. Andante con moto
3. Con moto moderato
4. Saltarello (Presto)

## SIDE TWO

MENDELSSOHN:

- OVERTURE "THE HEBRIDES" (FINGAL'S CAVE), Op. 26  
OVERTURE "RUY BLAS", Op. 95  
OVERTURE "THE FAIR MELUSINA", Op. 32

Although he can hardly be classified as a member of the Romantic movement, Mendelssohn was strongly influenced by extra-musical subjects in his orchestral works. Each of his three mature symphonies owes its origin to a non-musical stimulus, and the same is true of most of his overtures. He was particularly susceptible to travel impressions, to which at least three of the four works here recorded may be said to owe their origin, since the two sea overtures are undoubtedly based on personal experience. As a "landscape" composer Mendelssohn rather falls between two stools. His travel pieces have not the intense subjectivity of those of Berlioz and Liszt, yet, being a foreigner to the scenes he sets out to portray, he inevitably remains somewhat detached from them. His musical evocations of distant lands and oceans always appear the work of a visitor, sensitive and imaginative, yet fundamentally seeing things from a tourist's point of view, the countryside with the eyes of a townsman, the sea with those of a landsman. Yet with their sound musical qualities and attractive thematic material, their technical polish and frequent touches of genuine poetry, Mendelssohn's overtures are fully worthy of the favor with which the public has always regarded them.

### SIDE ONE

Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90 "Italian"

- 1st. Movement: Allegro vivace  
2nd. Movement: Andante con moto  
3rd. Movement: Con moto moderato  
4th. Movement: Saltarello (Presto)

In 1832 the Philharmonic Society of London commissioned the twenty-three-year-old Mendelssohn to compose a symphony. The work was written during his long tour of Italy and we know that he held it up until he had seen Naples, "which must play a part in it", as he told his family. It was finished in Berlin.

The symphony has the lightness and clarity of Mozart — a clarity which is accepted as being indicative of Italy — and a charm that is Mendelssohn's own. The orchestration throughout is lightweight: the horn and trumpet parts might have been written by Haydn or Mozart, so closely do they adhere to the Viennese system of harmonic and rhythmic stress.

With youthful impatience of preliminaries, Mendelssohn launches the opening theme of the first movement at once — on the violins. Away they leap, over an accompaniment of reiterated wind chords. This gay melody imprints itself on the memory, yet it does not come to a full close. Woodwind and strings, turn and turn about, begin to make their way to the dominant key of E major, a wonderful transition, and so to the second theme. This first appears in clarinets and bassoons and then in flutes and oboes, which die down, making way for a

lovely cadence for strings, and immediately a clarinet, in slow motion, voices a deliberate hint that we are about to proceed to thematic development. At this point a perky new string melody appears and is treated like a fugue, and theme number one soon makes its presence felt in the wind, above the fugal matter. The combination is as characteristic as it is unlabored. A fine crescendo leads to the customary restatement of the opening section of the movement. After this an animated coda brings in the perky fugal theme once more and moves deftly and exhilaratingly to the close.

The *Andante con moto* is obviously processional. The pace is set by a wailing figure which may well have been associated in the composer's mind with the Carrying of the Host, a common sight in Italian cities. The principal melody is breathed by oboes, bassoons and violas, and restores ease and serenity. One of Mendelssohn's most charming effects is achieved by wreathing the tune with a flute decoration. Later a new tune, gentle and humane, is heard from the clarinets, making an ingratiating contrast to the mournfulness of the processional figure. This melody is joined by the flutes in fresh embellishment, and soon, with a reminder of the pacesetting figure, the movement dies away.

The third movement is a minuet, but without the artificial formality of the old court dance. It is instinct with the most poetic feeling. In the trio, horns and bassoons have a particularly beautiful role to play, introducing a note of solemnity. The minuet is then repeated with interjections.

The swift saltarello which forms the finale need puzzle no one. There are three principal melodies, the first of which appears in coupled flutes and the second in the violins. These are actual saltarello tunes and their hopping gait should be noted carefully. As they are developed, a third, writhing melody insinuates itself; it drops no stitches, as do the others, and may therefore be styled a tarantella. This denotes a still greater urgency, since it was believed that victims of the bite of the tarantula spider, from which the dance takes its name, must demonstrate perpetual motion or die. The rest of the movement develops from this material.

### SIDE TWO

1. Overture: "The Hebrides", Op. 26

The *Fingal's Cave* or *Hebrides Overture* dates from 1830, when the composer was twenty-one years old. He had made his first journey to the British Isles the previous year; this had included a tour of Scotland in which he visited the Hebrides, and one of the composer's letters written from the islands includes a sketch of what were to be the opening bars of the overture. The work, which was revised in 1832, is one of the most inspired of all Mendelssohn's orchestral works.

2. Overture to "Ruy Blas", Op. 95

Mendelssohn composed the *Ruy Blas* Overture in 1839 as a prelude for a performance of Victor Hugo's play at the Leipzig Stadttheater, and also contributed some vocal music for the same occasion. Hugo's *Ruy Blas* had been a great success when it first appeared the year before (1839), but Mendelssohn disliked the play, a typical romantic product with a conspiratorial plot.

3. Overture to "The Fair Melusina", Op. 32

The *Fair Melusina* Overture dates from Mendelssohn's time in Dusseldorf where he occupied the post of general musical director from 1833 to 1835, and is the most satisfactory period in his career. *Die schöne Melusine* was an operatic libretto by Franz Grillparzer on the well-known legend of the woman who was half-serpent. After being rejected by Beethoven, the libretto was made into an opera by Conradin Kreutzer (1780-1849), but this soon fell into oblivion. Mendelssohn, who happened to hear a performance, was particularly struck by the poverty of the overture. He determined to shape it into better composition, not, it appears, for use with the opera, but as a concert-piece, and composed his own version in 1834, revising it the following year.

Ernest Ansermet, was born in Vevey in Switzerland and seemed at one time to be destined for an academic career. He was for a time mathematics professor at Lausanne University, but forsook the science for the art and became a musician. He studied first with Denereas at Lausanne and later with Otto Barblan and Ernest Bloch. In 1915 Ansermet joined the musical staff of the Diaghilev Ballet and it was during this time that he came into contact with Igor Stravinsky, an association which has borne such fruitful results for concert-goers and record lovers. In 1918 he founded L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande now known and respected the world over. Prof. Ansermet's visits to America have been all too infrequent, but in recent years he has conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the North American premiere of Falla's *L'Atlantide* during the Inaugural Week of Lincoln Center and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Metropolitan Opera.

Ansermet's musical taste is catholic and his repertoire unusually varied, although tending towards the modern. He has conducted many first performances of works by Swiss composers, and his name will of course be particularly associated with the works of Stravinsky. He is also the author of numerous essays and articles of which his book "Débat sur l'art contemporain" deserves particular mention.

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**MENDELSSOHN: SYMPHONY No 4 in A major,  
Op. 90 "ITALIAN"**

1. Allegro vivace (8.18)
2. Andante con moto (6.40)
3. Con moto moderato (7.07)
4. Salterello (Presto) (6.10)

**ERNEST ANSERMET**

conducting

L'ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE  
ROMANDE

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MENDELSSOHN :

OVERTURE "THE HEBRIDES" (FINGAL'S CAVE),

Op. 26

(9.35)

OVERTURE "RUY BLAS", Op. 95

(8.03)

OVERTURE "THE FAIR MELUSINA", Op. 32

(10.50)

ERNEST ANSERMET

conducting

L'ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE

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